The Acceptance of Vaccination and the Establishment of a Medical School in the
Hirosaki Feudal Domain at the End of the Edo Period

FUKUI Toshitaka

This paper examines the manner in which vaccinations were accepted in the Hirosaki feudal domain at the end of
the Edo Period and the establishment of a medical school as part of reforms to the medical system during that
time in conjunction with the acceptance of Rangaku and the implementation of vaccinations.

It is believed that the acceptance of Rangaku of any significance began in the Hirosaki feudal domain after
1804 and that an important figure in its acceptance is Takaya Tosa-ke who was a physician in Fukunoda village
(present-day Itayanagi-machi, Kita-tsurugu-gun) and had learned medicine at Shirando, a Rangaku school in Edo.
He was given permission to enter the school in May 5, 1792, though at the present time nothing at all is known
about how he succeeded in gaining entry. He later returned to his natal village to work as a physician, which is
viewed as the introduction of Rangaku by a village physician. Shirando was also where the feudal domain
physician Mikami Ryuki learned medicine (1811), showing that even feudal domain physicians were interested
in Rangaku.

In this way, the number of physicians who pursued Rangaku increased, and this paper takes a look at one
consequence of this, which is the acceptance of vaccinations. It would appear that the first instance of the
administration of vaccinations in the Hirosaki feudal domain occurred in April 1852 when a physician from Akita
called Itagaki Risai vaccinated about 30 people in Kizukuri (present-day Kizukuri-machi, Nishi-tsurugu-gun).
Perhaps motivated by the action of this physician, some physicians working for the Hirosaki domain decided to
administer vaccinations. Central among these were the feudal domain physician Karouji Shoun and his younger
brother Shoko. Unfortunately, however, the active introduction of vaccinations was not pursued in the Hirosaki
feudal domain.

Although vaccinations administered by the Karouji brothers did not go very well, there was some measure of
success and adoption of vaccinations at the end of the Edo Era owing to the actions of Sasaki Genshun who was
a Western physician working for the Hirosaki feudal domain. Besides administering vaccinations to many people,
Genshun established a vaccination annex at the medical school that had been built by that time, and there he
taught vaccination techniques to physicians from within the Hirosaki domain. Genshun's activities were
appreciated and supported by the school's head, Kitaoka Tajun, who had built the medical school and who had
been actively involved in reforms to the medical system.